

An Overview of OMS in INDIA: 1951 - 2000

by
Rudolph M. Rabe

India, not the Orient, was the first missions' focus of Charles E. Cowman, cofounder of the Oriental Missionary Society. About nine months following his conversion, he wrote in his diary on September 3, 1894, "Attended [A.B.] Simpson's missionary convention and was searched through and through and bared and exposed and searched by God's searching Spirit. I took another step toward God." That "another step" was, in part, to begin reading missionary literature, through which he was introduced to India's millions without Christ. Deeply distressed, Cowman began to think God was calling him to India. And very likely he would have gone had wife Lettie's health been sufficiently robust to tolerate India's demanding environment. Though God sent the Cowman's to the Orient, they did not forget India, but prayed fervently that her millions would one day come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

But not until July 1939, fifteen years after Cowman's death in 1924, did the OMS board vote to enter India. The first team of seven--Wesley/Betty Duewel, Roy/Dewdrop Davis, Mary Ella Taylor, John ("J.T.") and Ruth Seamands—landed in Bombay, February, 1941, followed a few weeks later by Eugene and Esther Erny (reassigned from China) to give experienced leadership to the new field.

The account of the first 10 years of OMS' involvement in India, 1941-1950, is included in Robert D. Wood's volume "In These Mortal Hands" [the history of OMS's first 50 years]. The following overview summarizes the growth of the work started in the 1940's and the subsequent ministries up to the year 2000, including the development and expansion of the Evangelical Church of India [ECI], which God raised up through the joint efforts of OMS personnel and Indian nationals who, for the most part, are graduates of our India Bible seminaries.

This summary follows the expansion of the work geographically (area by area) in the approximate sequence the areas were opened. The first mention of a person's name in each area is in bold. The initials "OMS" are used to indicate the mission even when "The Oriental Missionary Society" might be more historically accurate at the time.

ALLAHABAD

North India

Allahabad, in the north India state of Uttar Pradesh, is the city Ernest and Hazel Kilbourne felt God had very specifically indicated to them [on their 1939 survey visit to India] as being the right place for OMS to begin its ministry. Allahabad, which means "The place of God [Allah]," is an educational, commercial, and religious center of about one million, midway between New Delhi and Calcutta on the expansive Gangetic plain at the confluence of two of Hinduism's most sacred rivers, the Ganges and the Jumna. This confluence [the sangam] makes Allahabad the most auspicious bathing site for millions of Hindu devotees who come on annual pilgrimage hoping to find forgiveness of sins and final salvation--the cessation of the relentless cycle of rebirth.

Allahabad Bible Seminary

Beginnings--the 1940's:

Allahabad Bible Seminary [ABS] was the first seminary established by OMS in India, opening its doors in July 1942, to beginning class of 15 students enrolled from various churches in north India. The first faculty were Wesley and Betty Duewel, Eugene and Esther Erny, Beatrice Van Vranken (a Pilgrim Holiness Church missionary who had been working in a small town near Benares prior to OMS' arrival) and Gopi Chand Khanna, the first national staff member. Khanna was a converted high caste Hindu businessman whom Eugene Erny met in the World Gospel Mission Bible School near Bangalore where Khanna was an outstanding student. Others added to the staff during the first few years of the seminary were: Australians Wal and Eunice Anderson [1945], Edward and Dorothy Bruerd [1946], and from Northern Ireland Bill and Vera McIlfratrick [1947/48]. All were involved in seminary teaching or other assignments related to getting ABS off to a solid start. [Garnett Phillippe, just recently released from Japanese internment camp in China, arrived in 1946 (without wife Elma) to take over field leadership when the Ernys left for furlough, and then returned in 1950 (with Elma and son Jonathan) when the Ernys again left India--this time for Eugene to assume the presidency of OMS.]

The seminary struggled at first to find academically qualified students who would be willing to "risk" throwing their lot with OMS, which was at that time a new and largely unknown mission. But by the end of that first decade, ABS was recognized as doing quality work, and a number of missions and churches were sending their students for training. By that time, also, the reputation of OMS had been greatly enhanced through the wide-ranging revival and Bible conference ministry of Eugene Erny.

Evangelistic outreach:

ABS has always practiced evangelism along side academics. Evangelism assignments included literature distribution, Sunday schools, home Bible studies/prayer meetings, hospital and college campus visitation, open-air services, etc. A major challenge has been the outreach to Hindus through literature and conversation at the annual Hindu magh mela [religious fair] at the sangam. Millions of Hindu pilgrims swarm into Allahabad each winter to seek spiritual cleansing and to gain meritorious karma that might lessen misfortune or secure more favorable birth in future transmigrations. The net results of these efforts were not mass conversions (though some occurred), but students learned to deal with a great variety of people and circumstances in presenting the gospel.

Subsequent growth and development: The 1950's up to 2000:

1. An international staff developed through an influx of British Commonwealth personnel in the 1950's and 1960's. Additions were: Britishers Norman and Ethel Dudgeon (1955); Canadians Ruby Eberhart (1954), Gordon and Ruth Coles (1956), Elnora Hunter (1960), and Nathan and Fern Krampitz (1962). Americans Rudy and Eleanore Rabe transferred from south India (Gadag) in 1964 to replace the Duewels who left on furlough--but never returned because Wesley became increasingly involved in OMS administration, becoming president in 1969. Rudy was principal from 1964 to 1973, and field director from 1970 to 1984. Non-OMSers who served on the staff were Ernest and Jane Arloff of Interserve (1964-83) and Bill and Mary Hoke of the Brethren in Christ (1971-1978). Hoke was principal from 1974-78, and was succeeded by Krampitz (principal 1978-1990). National staff (secured at various times): Harry Mirchulall, the leading pastor of the British Friends; M.V. Thankachen (Th.D.), the first Indian staff member with an earned doctorate; Richard Howell, first Indian principal; Jagdhari Masih (Ph.D.), J. Sundara Raj, current principal, and many others.

2. Promoting revival and spiritual growth: Past and Current Past: **Revival** magazine, the small “spiritual journal” started by Erny in 1944, met with instant success and continued circulating in several Indian and overseas language editions until the late 1970’s. It was **Revival**, says Wesley Duewel, that “put OMS on the India map.” Current: ABS’ Spiritual Life Conference, also started by Erny in 1944, continues to be held each year. Outstanding Indian and expatriate Bible teachers/speakers minister to the seminary family and to hundreds of others in the larger Christian community of Allahabad and surrounding areas. First-time conversions number in the hundreds, countless others inspired for godly living and service.

3. As the years passed, the seminary’s academic program became a four-year Bachelor of Theology [B.Th.] degree course. Classes were taught in English since students came from several language areas. An External Department of Studies was started by Bob Brow [seconded to the staff by the British Bible Churchman’s Missionary Society in 1953], giving opportunity to many for non-residence study. The department offered quality course material, prepared by ABS staff and other pastors/teachers, on which annual exams had to be written. The department operated successfully for more than 25 years, then discontinued due to shortage of ABS staff and the increased development of regional Bible colleges all across India.

4. ABS affiliated with the Senate of Serampore College in 1974, in order to draw and keep qualified students, and to meet the academic expectations of missions/churches sending their students to ABS for training. The Senate [related to the Serampore College founded by William Carey and associates in the late 1790’s] is the only umbrella organization recognized by the Indian government under which Bible colleges can give accredited degrees. The affiliation requires keeping up to strict, externally set standards for students, faculty, and library. Though the Senate itself leans toward liberalism, ABS and other affiliated evangelical colleges are not penalized for teaching and holding to their own conservative theology.

5. Richard Howell joined ABS in 1980 as teacher, was mentored by Krampitz (the last expatriate OMSeR to serve as principal), and installed in 1990 as the first Indian principal of ABS. Howell continued to serve until 1996 when he resigned to accept a wider all-India ministry as general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India. [Wesley Duewel played a key role in early discussions leading to the formation of EFI, and later served two terms as its chairman.]

6. Erny Memorial School [EMS], started by Howell and his wife, Sunita, in 1992, is an elementary day school located in its own building on the ABS campus. The fees of the nearly 500 registered students help generate a growing monthly subsidy to ABS’ operating budget. EMS serves as an evangelism opportunity among the children as well as building “friendship bridges” to non-Christian parents.

7. ABS in 2000: A co-ed student body of about 100 coming from 10 different Indian states; a two-track curriculum in both English and Hindi ; an all-national faculty [two with doctors’ degrees, the rest with masters’] assisted by visiting short-term teachers; continuing evangelism outreach; a Student Missionary Fellowship that promotes faith-promise giving among the students and staff (and other local Allahabad churches) to support and pray for national missionaries; plans approved by the Senate of Serampore to proceed toward a Bachelor of Divinity [B.D.] upgrade; continuing campus development with Overseas Council assistance.

Allahabad area church growth:

North India has never seen the degree of response to the gospel as has been experienced in the south. As witness, the growth of the ECI in the Allahabad area has been painstakingly slow. Though ABS has graduated scores of pastors/evangelists for other missions/churches, the first ECI church was only organized about 1961, in Rewa, a town 90 miles southwest of Allahabad in the neighboring state of Madhya Pradesh. But preaching points developed and evangelism efforts kept extending to wider territory. At year 2000, ECI’s Allahabad District included 65 organized churches with a membership of just over 6200.

GADAG: Karnataka Area

Southwest India

Karnataka Bible Seminary

Beginnings:

Karnataka Bible Seminary [KBS], OMS' second seminary in India, was located in Gadag--a medium-sized town of about 100,000 some 400 miles southeast of Bombay in the Kanarese-speaking state of Karnataka [kar-not-aka]. The work in the Gadag area is mostly in villages and small towns in the territory given to OMS by the Methodist Church at the time comity understandings made it difficult for OMS to find any place not already claimed by some other mission. The seminary opened in July 1943, one year after ABS got its start in the north. The first year class grew from four (on starting day) to ten by the end of the first term.

Faculty members were: Roy and Dewdrop Davis, Mary Ella Taylor, and J.T. Seamands--four of the original seven to enter India. [J.T.'s wife, Ruth, had returned to the USA with their baby daughter, along with other expatriates, on the advice of the American Embassy in the summer of 1942, when it was feared the Japanese were about to invade India. A year and a half later, J.T. followed her. They returned to work with the Methodist Church under which J.T.'s father and great friend of OMS, Dr. E. A. ["Tata"] Seamands, and brother, David, were also serving in India.]

The first full-time national staff member was Rev. Elisha James, a native Kanarese speaker. He was a seminary-trained pastor of the London Mission. On the invitation of Eugene Erny, he joined the faculty in 1944, and filled an invaluable role as teacher, dean of men, seminary pastor, and the first superintendent of the fledgling ECI Gadag district.

Other missionaries who arrived in the 1940's included: Gail and Ruby Fletchall and Weldon and Sylvia Culver (1946); Orville and Aileen French (1948), following repatriation from internment camp in China [Orville serving as south India field director]; Dale and Polly McClain, 1949, for one year before reassignment to ABS.

The staff ranks soon became sharply depleted, for the Fletchalls stayed only two years, and the Culvers returned to the USA by early 1951. Frenches also left in 1952, for theirs was an interim assignment of one term only. But further staff came with the arrival of Rudolph and Eleanore Rabe, and two sons, in February 1952. They learned Kanarese and settled into teaching and administration.

Evangelism and church planting:

The size of the KBS student body seldom rose beyond 20-25. But small numbers did not mean small efforts in evangelism. Students distributed/sold literature, conducted open-air meetings [often facing hostile opposition], conducted Sunday Schools [Mary Ella's passion along with women's work], showed the Life of Christ slides in front of Hindu temples in low-caste areas [upper castes being much less open]. Twice-yearly field terms out in the villages gave occasion to locate and evangelize among responsive groups, if they would be found.. Some were located in and around the town of Gangavathi, an area 75 miles east of Gadag. But the going was slow, the results meager.

A more promising situation arrived with the completion of a large dam and extensive canal system that took water out into the semi-desert villages. New agricultural opportunities brought in many Telugu people from the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh. Among the new arrivals were many nominal Christians, and Hindus who seemed more ready to listen and respond to the message. The result: a number of Telugu congregations were organized; more of the Kanarese-speaking locals began to show interest; pastors and evangelists had to become bilingual in order to minister to the Telugu believers.

Further evangelism was carried on through the Jeeva Prakash ["Light of Life"] correspondence course, a major focus of Roy Davis' ministry. Students signed up through newspaper advertisements to study the life of Christ in John's gospel. Many hundreds of responses came from both Hindus and Muslims stating they had accepted Christ and were going to follow Him. The chief problem of this ministry was follow-up. Students were widely scattered, making personal contact virtually impossible due to the shortage of both personnel and finances. [And due to possible persecution, many students did not want to be contacted.]

National leaders:

Elisha James resigned in 1958 to return to the pastorate. He was succeeded by Sundar Tholar, a lay evangelist who joined OMS in 1953. His business acumen and building experience enabled the district to see significant progress in church and parsonage construction. In 1970, he also resigned to join the India Ambassadors for Christ team, which ministered, all over the country, including times at the ABS convention. Tholar was followed by K. S. Jacob, a 1951 graduate of KBS, an energetic evangelist, and a pastor to the pastors (as was his wife Grace to the pastors' wives). His major contribution in district development was organizing the annual jatra [camp meeting] that brought hundreds of village Christians together for several days of Bible teaching and fellowship. The mingling of the converts, including preparing food and eating together, helped conquer lingering caste prejudices. The believers began to recognize that they were all just "Christians," not "high caste" or "low caste" Christians--not an insignificant understanding!

The Karnataka District at 2000:

The ECI now counts 56 churches with a combined membership of over 5000. KBS continued training until 1972. By that time an adequate number of workers was available for the relatively slow growth in church planting. The Davises, then the only resident missionaries, went on furlough, returning in 1975 to work in Delhi until their retirement from the field in 1978. With church growth picking up again in the 1990's, KBS was again re-opened, this time in the district headquarters town of Gangavathi. Village-level pastors are being trained for both the Kanarese and Telugu churches, and for Every Creature Crusade team ministry.

SIMLA

Northwest India

In 1952, the India North West Mission, a small British faith mission of kindred spirit with OMS, ceased its operations in the northern city of Simla and surrounding Himalayan territory, and made its missionaries available to OMS: Arthur and Edith Andrews, Jack and Violet Ferris, and Joe Black (and Ruby, following her marriage to Joe). The Andrews, who had worked in Tibet for ten years, soon retired from the field; the Ferrises ran a bookstore for a while in Simla, and then transferred to Madras. The Blacks, assisted by national colleagues, particularly Chaman Lal Singh (a graduate of ABS), were the mainstays of the evangelism and church-planting efforts in that district of mountain towns and villages.

Keeping Simla [the summer capital of the British Raj] as the center of their operations, the Blacks and Chaman Lal concentrated on a widespread literature distribution program. They traveled hundreds of miles over rough/rugged mountain roads in Joe's sturdy Landrover. Where roads didn't exist, they loaded their backpacks and trudged mountain trails to remote villages, going all the way up to the Tibetan border, passing out tracts, selling gospels, engaging shop keepers, farmers and coolies in conversation about Jesus. The Simla church, located on Mall Road where thousands of tourists promenade during the summer, had a large book display in its storefront window and conducted nightly slide showings on the life of Christ to by-passers. The current number of ECI churches in the Simla and neighboring Punjab district, is about 20. ECI operates the small Sadhu Sundar Singh Bible School in the mountain town of Solan, 30 miles from Simla, where workers are trained for that demanding mountain area.

Blacks raised money in the U.K. to make the down payment on a beautiful, multi-storied building, which housed the already well-known English-medium Chalet Day School. A condition for purchasing the building required OMS to keep the school in operation. This was done successfully, and fees from the several hundreds of students have generated income for all running expenses as well as helping to support the pastor of the Simla ECI congregation. The school now operates under the auspices of the ECI's school management board.

[This choice property, and the income generated by the school, was one of the properties in north India that became the major focus of litigation that continued for several years between the ECI and the breakaway North India Outreach Society [NIOS]. The ECI eventually prevailed, but at the unfortunate cost of broken fellowship, the loss of momentum in evangelism and church-planting efforts, and expenditure of funds on court cases which might better have been invested in other ways. See further under "Delhi" below.]

MID-INDIA

OMS had long desired to broaden its evangelism and church planting into other Hindi-speaking areas beyond Allahabad. The comity arrangements among mission organizations ["no trespassing" on each other's territory] had made it difficult to find any area not already occupied. But in 1950, fresh opportunity arrived. The British Friends' Mission [Quakers] invited OMS to take over a segment of their work located about 500 miles southwest of Allahabad in the neighboring Hindi-speaking state of Madhya Pradesh. This area became known as OMS' Mid-India field. Several churches, established earlier by the Friends, were barely alive. No evangelism was being done. Thus OMS had great scope for attempting to revive spiritually stagnant churches, as well as for evangelizing in villages and towns. The Friends made available one of their leading pastors, Rev. Harry Mirchulall, a native speaker of beautiful Hindi, who had a heart for God and evangelism.

The opening of this new field required the shifting of personnel from Allahabad to assist Mirchulall. Rev. G. C. Khanna and family moved to Bhopal, the state's capitol. The Andersons and McIlfatricks moved to the large village of Sohagpur, along with the students of Gopiganj Bible Institute--a small branch school ABS had started in the large village of Gopiganj, midway between Allahabad and Benares. The school was renamed "The Mid-India Bible Institute" and continued to operate under the Andersons and McIlfatricks until 1953. At that time it was decided the students could be trained in ABS just as well as in Sohagpur, so they were sent back to Allahabad. Joining them was Mirchulall who continued his ministry with OMS for 25 years as ABS teacher, seminary pastor, convention interpreter, and superintendent of the Allahabad district churches. The McIlfatricks also moved back to Allahabad following their furlough, leaving only the Andersons in Sohagpur. They continued their intensive evangelism outreach along with the mid-India pastors until 1961. After one more year back on the staff at Allahabad, they returned to Australia for retirement.

[Wal Anderson's book, **Against All Odds**, contains hundreds of thrilling anecdotes of their India years of ministry. This highly recommended volume is available through the Australian office of OMS International.]

Gordon and Ruth Coles were assigned to Mid-India for their second term of service, arriving in Bhopal in 1963. They worked closely with G. C. Khanna in Bhopal where a very large heavy electrical manufacturing unit had been constructed. Thousands of employees lived in massive housing colonies, which became prime targets for evangelism. Gordon helped the ECI to plant a new church in one of those colonies. He and Ruth also had a ministry with the children of European employees who were assisting the India government in getting the heavy electrical plant operational.

During the 1950's and 1960's Esther Close (a veteran missionary who joined OMS the same time as Bea Van Vranken back in 1942) was engaged in her midwifery ministry in Mid-India. People in the villages surrounding her home and clinic in the remote little village of Bankhed, saw in Esther's life and service a living demonstration of the gospel. Many babies were delivered, lives touched, and given the only news they would ever hear about Jesus Christ. God alone knows the final results of Esther's sacrificial ministry.

Rev. Aslam Abraham, a convert from a Muslim background, and an ABS graduate, took over the role of district superintendent when Rev. Khanna died from a fatal heart attack in the early 1970's. Aslam pastored the church in the major railway center of Itarsi and served a couple of terms as the chairman of the ECI's All India Conference. A gifted evangelist with a tender heart, Aslam was widely sought after as an evangelist for many conferences, especially where the gospel was to be presented to Muslims.

Hinduism remains strongly entrenched in rural India, so the Mid-India evangelistic efforts produced few new converts. Existing congregations, however, were revived, and a few new churches were planted. In 2000, the total number of ECI churches in the district (including some in the adjoining state of Uttar Pradesh) numbered about a dozen with a membership of several hundreds.

[Before Rev. Aslam passed away, he objected to the strong central control of the ECI administration and led some of the ECI churches into the North India Outreach Society which called its churches the "Evangelical Christian Church of India" [ECCI], the original name of the ECI. Again, the unfortunate result was litigation for control of church properties.]

MADRAS

South India

Madras coming into focus Eugene Erny's wide-ranging ministry in the 1940's brought him into contact with a highly respected Indian Christian layman, D. Samuel, who operated a small Bible school in Madras. Prior to his meeting Erny, D. Samuel had learned about the Oriental Missionary Society through reading Charles E. Cowman's biography, *Missionary Warrior*. He began praying that some day the Oriental Missionary Society would start a Bible training institute in Madras. Accepting an invitation to participate in Allahabad's Spiritual Life Convention, Samuel discovered that Erny also was praying that God would lead OMS to Madras. Erny's departure from India in 1950 (to take over the presidency of the mission) precluded his personal involvement in the move to Madras, but God had Garnett and Elma Phillippe ready.

Madras Theological Seminary & College

Beginnings:

The Phillippes moved from Allahabad to Madras just as soon as the Duewels returned from furlough in February 1953. They had been in consultation with D. Samuel, and together set early July as the opening of the new Madras Bible Seminary [MBS]. With good foresight they had sent Victor Joseph, a young pastor friend of Samuel's, to study for a year in Allahabad to become acquainted with OMS¹ doctrinal distinctive and operating philosophy.

When the Phillippes reached Madras, the rush began to find suitable property. Providentially, they found a large house on Waddell Road that the Hindu owner declared was available for rent "for one year only!" The two-story house provided dormitory space, a large room that could serve as both classroom and chapel, another room for a library, and an upstairs apartment for the Phillippe's residence. Classes began on July 7, 1953, for 15 men students, all friends and acquaintances of D. Samuel and members of various local Madras churches. [One of the students was M. Ezra Sargunam, who later earned his B.Th. from ABS, and who became the first bishop of the ECI.] The main faculty was G. Phillippe, D. Samuel, and Victor Joseph. Classes were taught in Tamil--Victor Joseph doing the interpreting for Garnett in addition to teaching his own classes.

Phillippe health crisis:

The accumulation of many pressures for a number of years on the Phillippes [from China's interment camp to the rush to get MBS launched] seriously affected Garnett's health. Soon after the seminary opened, he had to get away to Kodaikanal hill station for some weeks of rest. But upon returning to Madras, his health had not improved. Rather, it worsened upon his learning the visa application of Norman and Laralee Culver, new appointees to Madras, had been refused.

Britishers David and Beryl Rigby, furloughing in England after a very successful first term of ministry in British Guiana, were requested to proceed to Madras to give assistance to the Phillippes rather than returning to British Guiana. Somewhat reluctantly, they arrived in Madras in January 1954. David had to immediately assume major responsibilities in teaching and getting the students systematically involved in weekend evangelism assignments. Still with no improvement in Garnett's health, the Phillippes returned to the USA in April, 1955.

The "Rigby Plan:"

Madras was sometimes designated "Asia's most Christian city" because of the large number of churches scattered throughout the city. But with a population of nearly two million, there were still thousands waiting to be evangelized. Rigby was a medical doctor, but his first priority and love was evangelism. He took on for MBS the challenge of Madras's unreached, and organized what came to be known as "the Rigby plan" for church planting. The plan was just a straightforward targeting of housing colonies, which the students would visit on successive weekends to distribute a series of gospel leaflets, preach in the open air, conduct children's meetings, and try to make friends with the residents. At the end of a 10-week distribution period, they would set up a small tent and Rigby would preach evangelistic messages each night for a week.

From the very beginning, these efforts met with encouraging results. Nominal Christians and Hindus were converted. As a small group of new believers began to form, an MBS student was assigned as "pastor." He would rent a house that would be his residence on weekends, and use the largest room for the new believers to meet for prayer and instruction. In time, a "mat-shed church" would be erected and the believers would have a common meeting place. These were the humble, but solid, beginnings of a church growth movement that steadily spread into many sections of the city, and far beyond.

Jack and Vi Ferris were transferred to Madras from Simla to assist the Rigbys. In early 1959, the Rigbys feeling their mission to India had been completed returned to England. Rudy and Eleanore Rabe were then reassigned from Gadag to Madras, arriving in March to take over as MBS principal. Two years after the Rigbys returned to England, they had second thoughts and chose to return to Madras for another five years to work with the developing churches. The Rabes returned to Gadag in 1961, until their reassignment to the ABS staff in Allahabad in 1964.

Growth and development of seminary facilities:

In 1960, the Hindu owner of the house accommodating the seminary insisted that OMS buy the property, or move out. Though a wide search was made for a different location, nothing suitable turned up. At the time, no territory beyond the city limits had been assigned to OMS (under the then existing comity arrangement), and since it was thought that few, if any, further church planting opportunities in Madras remained, OMS agreed to make the purchase even though they sensed the property was too small. Subsequent church growths made it clear rather quickly that more, not fewer, students would have to be trained. Plans were drawn up to demolish the old house and build an entirely new and more commodious set of buildings. This brought the first of several **Men for Missions** work teams to Madras to assist in this reconstruction. The first new buildings were dedicated in April 1977. Further additions and remodeling had to be carried out later at different times; and at 2000, the search is on for a much larger property to entirely relocate the whole school, which, since 1993, has the name Madras Theological Seminary and College [MTSC]. With its total enrollment of over 400 students (including those registered in the external department), MTSC can lay claim to being the largest evangelical training institution in India.

Evangelism and church growth:

Student involvement in evangelism and new church planting has been an integral part of the Madras seminary training from the very beginning of its history. The practices of weekend assignments to specific locations for home visitation and literature distribution have opened up numerous new opportunities for church planting. Most of the MTSC faculty are involved in outreach ministry with the students, if not already serving some of the ECI churches as pastors.

The multiplication of churches was greatly accelerated when New Zealander Graham Houghton arrived back in Madras in 1972 with his bride Carol, and was appointed MBS principal. (Graham had previously served as a single evangelist for several years prior to his going to the USA for study.) While serving as principal of MBS, Houghton worked closely with ECI leader Ezra Sargunam and challenged him to have the church set measurable goals for growth, suggesting as a starter--100 churches by 1980. The church had at that time only 25 congregations. The challenge was accepted, and soon in each church the rallying cry became, "100 churches by 1980!" The goal was reached before the target date! Immediately, and with great excitement, a second goal was set for 200 churches by 1984. Again that goal was met, and churches continued to multiply.

Around 1992, the concluding year of then OMS president Wesley Duewel's "Decade of Harvest" challenge, ECI's leadership focused on the upcoming auspicious year 2000. Taking a bold leap of faith, they set a goal that, to many, seemed improbable, if not impossible: 1000 churches by the year 2000. And once again, God honored faith and faithful effort--two years ahead of schedule. On January 16, 1998, the grand celebration of the 1000th church took place in the city of Madras. On the same day over 2000 new converts were baptized, and the next church growth goal announced: 2000 churches by 2005.

Such historic growth could not have happened without the help of each local church pastor, the students of the several Bible schools that the ECI started, and especially without the help given by the Every Creature Crusade [ECC] teams. The ECC ministry was started in Madras in 1972, by Houghton who had been challenged by Dwight Ferguson and Stanley Tam to get this intensive evangelistic ministry launched in India. From the five or six teams that began their concentrated evangelistic format in the immediate environs of Madras, team numbers have grown to 58. They are currently working in seven different Indian states, in New Delhi, and on the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. Rev. D. Chellappa, a graduate of Allahabad Bible Seminary and the national coordinator of the ECC ministry, reported that the teams have been instrumental in planting 456 churches from 1972 up to 2000. [The Houghtons were seconded in 1983 to the South Asia Institute for Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) in Bangalore.]

ECI governing its own affairs:

According to early versions of the church's constitution and by-laws, self-government was tied to the percentage of self-support attained; i.e., full self-support would affect full self-government. But in 1970, even though most churches still required financial subsidy, the OMS executive committee recognized mature national leadership and voted to turn over the reins of full administration to the church itself. The church constitution was revised accordingly, and the first national general superintendent of the Evangelical Christian Church of India [later renamed as just the Evangelical Church of India] was Rev. G. C. Khanna. He served until his untimely death, and was succeeded by Rev. Aslam Abraham, who was later succeeded by Rev. M. Ezra Sargunam.

The All-India Conference of the ECI voted to change the title of the chief officer from Chairman to President. And as a further development, Rev. M. Ezra Sargunam was consecrated as the first Bishop of the Evangelical Church of India on February 13, 1993.

ECI Bible schools and day schools:

India has seemed to never lack for enthusiastic young men anxious to do "God's service." Many of them are not academically qualified to study in either ABS or MTSC. And neither is it necessary that all should, or need to, study for a theological degree. But in order to capitalize on this youth availability and enthusiasm, and to help prepare pastors to care for the many new churches being planted [about two each week], ECI organized 10 regional Bible schools where students are part-time students and part-time pioneer evangelists. The students often work in conjunction with ECC teams, and have been a strong factor in the amazing spread of the church. As have, also, the national missionaries working under the India Missionary Movement [IMM], ECI's missionary arm, which sends and supports workers to seven states.

Calcutta Bible Seminary [CBS], newly constructed with the help of Rev. Elmer Kilbourne and Samaritan's Purse, opened in July 2000, with a beginning class of 75. CBS joined ABS and MTSC as the ECI's three degree-granting seminaries. Each of these schools has its own board, but all operate under the authority of the ECI-OMS Board of Theological Education.

The ECI has organized nearly 50 day schools [from primary to high school], which operate in many locales. In addition to dispensing secular education, each school is a base for effective Christian witness to the students and their families. In many instances, students and staff have become believers and been integrated into the local ECI church. These schools have also had remarkable financial success. In addition to being fully self-sufficient, school fees have generated funds to help the churches support pastors, purchase land, and construct buildings.

Ministering to the whole man:

Holistic ministry--ministering to the physical/social needs of people as well as to the spiritual--has been an integral part of ECI's program since the early 1970's. Through its department of Relief and Development many good works have been done in Jesus¹ name to demonstrate the church's concern for the whole man. Aid administered through the local church has come in a variety of forms: direct distribution of food and clothing to communities ravished by typhoon winds, flood, and fire; "Jesus wells" dug, coconut trees planted, vocational training provided to the economically deprived, etc. These "good works" caught the attention of Western relief agencies like World Vision, Samaritan's Purse, and Compassion International, all of which have partnered with the ECI in various ways to help meet the physical needs of the disenfranchised and often hurting people, to whom the gospel must be presented. When the proclamation of the good news is complemented with deeds of mercy, ECI finds people are more likely to give greater attention to what the evangelist is saying.

NEW DELHI

The last OMS initiative in India was in the capitol, New Delhi. Following their several years of literature work in the Himalayas, Joe and Ruby Black were assigned in 1968, to Madras. There Joe again involved himself heavily in literature distribution and became an encourager and pastor to the pastors. One of the pastors he felt especially close to was A. Amos. Amos, years earlier, had been a government beekeeper instructor in Simla. There he met Joe Black, and the Lord through Joe's ministry. The return of Houghtons to Madras in 1972 released the Blacks for another reappointment. This time in 1973 to initiate in Delhi an aggressive ECC team ministry Joe's expertise in evangelism and literature distribution made him a "natural" to head up the ECC effort. He requested that the church assign Amos to work with him.

Joe and Amos spent several months carefully surveying possible areas among the many fast-developing housing colonies springing up on the northern and western fringes of Delhi. Janakpuri colony was chosen where the first ECI church was established in 1976. Other ECC teams worked in several different areas, a very promising one being Rajouri Garden where a large bank building on one of the major roads became available for purchase. Again, Joe was able to raise funds for the down payment, and the purchase was made. The building provided a spacious hall for worship services, a large storage area for the tens of thousands of tracts and gospels used in the ECC ministry, and quarters for the pastor's family. Over the years, God blessed the teams' efforts, new churches formed whose congregations were the Hindu/Muslim converts, along with resident Christians who were without any suitable church to attend. By 1984, 14 churches had been organized. But then there was an unfortunate split of the Delhi work.

Cultural, social, and linguistic differences between north and south have been an unfortunate barrier to India's national integration. People tend to think regionally rather than nationally. And so it happened in the ECI. Among the northern pastors, there were fears that the fewer north India churches would be outnumbered and overwhelmed by the larger number of south India churches. Differences of opinion in regard to church government (i.e., strong central control versus regional autonomy, especially in regard to church properties); different personality types and styles of leadership; unhappiness with decisions that seemed arbitrary--all contributed to strained relations between north and south. Amos and many pastors in the north withdrew from the AIC and registered themselves as a separate organization called the North India Outreach Society [NIOS]. They continued evangelizing and organizing churches independently from the ECI. NIOS continues to function under the leadership of Amos, and by 2000, reported having 33 churches and a newly constructed training school for needed workers in the city of Dehra Dun, 350 miles north of Delhi.

Most of the north India churches/pastors that resisted the strong central control of the AIC in the mid-1980¹s have since returned to the AIC umbrella. The Delhi district of the ECI, under the leadership of Rev. P.K. Robert, had in 2000 about 20 fully organized churches.

Endnote

At year 2000, the OMS India story has become the story of the Evangelical Church of India. God used each of the OMSers--many of whom have long since "ceased from their labors"--to contribute to the training of the leaders and many pastors of the ECI. They, in turn, have multiplied themselves into a great number who are declaring the good news of God¹s grace to Hindus and Muslims, and many others from one end of the country to the other. For God¹s glory, a great work has been done, a great church has been firmly planted, yet an even greater work remains. For hundreds of millions in India are still without God and without hope--numerically many times more than what grabbed Charles Cowman¹s attention over 100 years ago. These waiting millions are the challenge facing the Evangelical Church of India as its moves courageously under the leadership of the Holy Spirit into the 21st Century.